

CENTRE - FORWARD
Keith Searle, out for five months due to ligament trouble, is all set to make his comeback to Rothmans Isthmian League soccer on Thursday when Wycombe Wanderers visit Leatherhead for an important Division One match.

Keith wisely took things easy in his first two matches recently. He had 15 minutes as substitute against Chesham at Loakes Park and played throughout the 90 minutes in the return at the Meadow. But against Banbury in another Premier Midweek Floodlight League game on Thursday, he showed many of his familiar skills.

Again last night (Monday) he was in fine form and looked to have regained all his confidence. Keith's renowned ability in the air will give Wycombe's attack at Leatherhead much more bite upfront.

They will need it. Leatherhead have enjoyed a successful season this term, especially in cup competitions. Although not challenging for league honours, they were within one match of Wembley in the Amateur Cup and reached the last four of the Surrey Senior Cup.

Recently their form has wavered. They lost out 4-2 away

to Enfield recently and before this went down 2-0 to Walton and Hershham. But with several players of undoubted ability in their side, they will be a tough proposition for title chasing Wycombe. Peter Smith, the Tanners' goalkeeper, was recently capped for England while Chris Kelly also received international recognition this year.

Dave Reid and Barry Webb are highly efficient centre-backs while Dave Cooper is one of the most talented full-backs on the league circuit. He was particularly impressive when Leatherhead beat Hendon 2-0 in their Amateur Cup, second round, replay at Loakes Park. Upfront, Leatherhead have Kelly, the speedy Nobby Skinner and veteran striker Ron Fruen.

Early in the season, however, they were well beaten by Wycombe at Loakes Park, 2-0, the Blues recording their fourth successive win of the season. Tony Horseman and Keith Searle were the marksmen, both goals coming in the first half. Doug Francis hit the bar for Leatherhead with a fine effort but he has since left the club.

Other Wycombe team changes could see Paul Birdseye returning at full-back for his first league game since Hayes on April 1, while Terry Reardon should have recovered from his mouth injury for a place in midfield.

Last night, the Tanners got back onto winning form with a 2-0 league victory, their 18th this term, when they beat Hitchin 2-0 at home.

Before Wanderers travel to Fetcham Grove, Leatherhead, however, they will know the outcome of tonight's (Tuesday) matches between their two main championship rivals. Bishop's Stortford travel to Tooting and Mitcham, while Hendon have a tough game away to Dulwich Hamlet.

Recent form indicates Hendon are feeling all the pressures of a title run-in. Last week they could only draw against Hayes and Barking, both goalless encounters. Defeat at Champion Hill tonight would be a severe blow to their hopes.

Hendon are currently in second place behind the Blues but have two matches in hand. If successful in both those games they could be one point ahead of Wycombe but their remaining

matches are far from easy.

Their next league match after tonight is at Wycombe on Tuesday, April 30 — a match that could decide the champions there and then. Hendon also have to meet Bishop's Stortford at Claremont Road, another match that will have a significant effect on the championship. Sutton and Woking also have to be played home and away and the latter could well cause them problems as they did Wycombe not long ago, Woking winning 2-0.

Their final match of the season is not easy either. They visit Leatherhead on May 18.

Stortford, owing to their amazing series of cup conquests (they are still in three competitions), have fallen behind in the league programme but of

their 11 remaining matches, seven are significantly at home.

They too must visit Dulwich Hamlet, who although fostering an outside interest in the league race, could well decide it with matches against two of the three contenders. They meet Stortford on Thursday, April 25. The Amateur Cup winners also have to face Wycombe at home on May 7 and must travel to Hendon on May 16. Their final encounter is at home to Woking.

Woking, who at one stage had played no less than a dozen games fewer than other clubs, are in with a mathematical chance of the championship but only the most ardent optimist would regard their potential champions.

One of the key factors in the run-in to the end of the campaign will be Stortford's form after their Amateur Cup victory over Ilford at Wembley on Saturday. Their triumph could work two ways for them.

Obviously their confidence is sky high at present but there could be a tendency to become overconfident. With 62 points at present behind them, they have four games — a possible 12 points — in hand over Wycombe which would put them two points adrift of the Blues. Those points could be decided when the two teams meet at The

Remaining matches

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: 11 matches to play, seven home, four away. Remaining fixtures: Tonight (Tuesday) April 23 — away to Tooting, Thursday, April 25 — away to Dulwich, Tuesday, April 30 — home to Leatherhead, Thursday, May 2 — home to St. Albans, Saturday, May 4 — home to Oxford, Tuesday, May 7 — home to Wycombe Wanderers, Thursday, May 9 — home to Leytonstone, Saturday, May 11 — away to Walton, Tuesday, May 14 — home to Hitchin, Thursday, May 16 — away to Hendon, Saturday, May 18 — home to Woking.

HENDON: Nine matches to play — four home, five away. Remaining fixtures: Tonight (Tuesday) April 23 — away to Dulwich, Tuesday, April 30 — away to Wycombe, Thursday, May 2 — home to Hayes, Saturday, May 4 — home to Sutton, Thursday, May 9 — home to Woking, Saturday, May 11 — away to Sutton, Tuesday, May 14 — away to Woking, Thursday, May 16 —

Had they lost at Wembley, however, the league title would have been the ultimate aim. It will be interesting to see how their Amateur Cup success affects them, but little doubt, the Hertfordshire club will be right there at the finish. Wycombe themselves have to easy games left now. They could catch Haverley Saturday but Roger Bangor is expected off after only 15 minutes of the final, is expected to be fit in time. Hendon are next in line on Tuesday, April 30, and then comes the two 'crunch' matches. On Tuesday, May 7, Wycombe visit Stortford and two days later, take on Walton and Hershham at Loakes Park. At one time in the race themselves, Walton have slipped recently, including a 6-1 reverse at Barking with a full strength side. The 12-19, sees the Blues against another of the top clubs, Leytonstone. They are away on Wednesday and home the following Saturday. One point in Wycombe's favour, however, is that they have the advantage of being at home at present and what is important — with the points already in the bag.